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RIBES SPECIOSUM

FUCHSIA-FLOWERED GOOSEBERRY

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RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
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Santa Ana Cañon, Orange County, California
Established 1927 in Memory of
JOHN W. BIXBY

RIBES SPECIOSUM
FUCHSIA-FLOWERED GOOSEBERRY

Saxifragaceae Saxifrage Family

Shrub 4-6 ft. high (rarely 8-10 ft.), usually equally broad and dense with numerous somewhat arching graceful branches. Stems 1-1½ in. in diam., densely prickly on young growth, later nearly smooth; each node with 3 stout spines ¼-¾ in. long. Foliage appears shortly after first fall rains and persists until mid-summer. Leaves alternate, somewhat fascicled on short branchlets, the largest with petioles nearly 1 in. long, blades ½-¾ in. long (sometimes 1-1½ in. on vigorous vegetative shoots), roundish with a cuneate base, usually 3-lobed, but each lobe with several irregularly crenate lobings, thickened or coriaceous, glossy green above, lighter beneath, slightly glandular-hairy, but becoming glabrate in age. Flowers brilliant scarlet, borne 2-3 in short pendulous racemes, the parts in 4's; calyx lobes ⅜ in. long, lightly glandular, erect, almost hiding the slightly shorter petals which are narrow at base, broadened to a nearly truncate summit and with involute margins; stamens ¾-1 in. long, the anthers 2-celled; ovary inferior, glandular, 1-celled, bearing a single style, 2-parted at its summit. Ovary inferior, glandular-hairy. At maturity the fruit is a dry, glandular-bristly berry about ½ in. long by ¼ in. thick, at the end of which the dried flower parts still remain. Each berry contains 20-25 dark brown to nearly black, roughened seeds about ⅛ in. long, irregularly shaped but rounded on one face and angular on other, filled with abundant endosperm. In germination the seed coat is raised above ground, each cotyledon is petioled, its blade is oval, about ⅜ in. long, lightly glandular-hairy above and on margins, only faintly so beneath; next leaves resemble those of mature plants, but are much smaller.

The genus *Ribes* (word from ancient Arabic) is widespread nearly throughout the world and consists of about 125 species. These plants comprise two distinct groups known as currants and gooseberries, the latter sometimes separated into a separate genus *Grossularia,* largely because of the spines. At least 17 species plus many varieties of gooseberries are native to California. In areas where there are White Pine forests, gooseberries are being eradicated because they are alternate hosts for the White Pine Blister Rust. However, *Ribes speciosum* is not of interest in this connection, for its native habitat is outside the White Pine forest areas.

Ribes speciosum (the specific name means showy or handsome) was described in 1814 by Frederick Pursh, a German botanist, who for 12 years lived in the United States and wrote an early flora of North America. The specimen upon which Pursh based his description was collected by Archibald Menzies, botanist on Captain Vancouver's

Voyage along the northwest coast of America, 1791-'95. Menzies' specimen was said to have come from the "Northwest Coast," but it must have been from around Monterey. Additional names which have been applied to this plant are: *Ribes stamineum* Smith (1815); *Ribes fuchsioides* Mocino & Sesse (1826); *Ribes tricanthum* Menzies (1832); *Robsonia speciosa* Spach (1838); and *Grossularia speciosa* Coville & Britton (1908). These are all merely nomenclatorial variations.

This gooseberry was introduced into England by Mr. Collie, Surgeon of the H. M. S. Blossom in 1829, and was illustrated in color in Curtis Botanical Magazine, plate 3530, in 1836, at which time its Fuchsia-like flowers were emphasized.

In the coastal regions of California from Monterey and Santa Clara Counties south to San Diego County, *Ribes speciosum* is fairly common in the chaparral and oak belts at elevations of less than 2,000 ft. It delights in north slope canyons and partially shaded sites, but is not particular as to soil, except that the drainage must be good. After the first fall rains the lifeless appearing bushes break out into new growth and soon the branches are almost hidden by the dense cover of glossy green leaves. By late January a few flowers appear on plants in warmer spots, but the real profusion of bloom comes late in March or early April. It is then that every branch hangs heavily laden with the brilliant scarlet flowers. By July the fruits are mature and soon thereafter the leaves are shed. Throughout the long, dry, summer months the plants are completely dormant. Like many other chaparral plants this species is an aestivator (a name borrowed from the animal ecologists and applied to organisms which sleep or rest during the summer).

Propagation of *Ribes speciosum* is by seeds or by fall cuttings. The former method appears to produce the best plants. Seeds planted in the fall germinate readily and may be handled in containers or in the ground, preferably in a lath-house the first season, and planted out the following fall. A well drained site in partial shade and moderate irrigation the first season are essential, but thereafter the plants should not be watered during the summer. A well located plant should live for 10 to 15 years or more and produce a wealth of flowers each spring. Pruning should be confined to removal of old or straggly canes by cutting close to the ground, thus encouraging vigorous new shoots.

The Fuchsia-Flowered Gooseberry is the finest California gooseberry for ornamental plantings in mild regions. Its flowers are showy against the rich glossy green foliage and persist for several weeks. The long flowering sprays make excellent decorations and are available when few other flowers are blooming. The chief objection to using this species in ordinary gardens is its summer dormancy, otherwise it is well worth planting. Certainly no naturalistic planting of California natives should be without this colorful shrub.

CARL B. WOLF

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Dedication of Garden Foundation to the Board of Trustees for the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden of the Native Plants of California:

"THE NATURE, OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE INSTITUTION HEREBY FOUNDED AND TO BE MAINTAINED HEREUNDER.

ITS NATURE: A botanic garden of the native plants of California, herbarium and botanical library, containing living and/or preserved specimens of trees, plants and flowers native to California, and literature relating thereto.

ITS OBJECT: The preservation and improvement of the property now transferred and such property as may hereafter be transferred to the Trustees for those who not only wish to enjoy, but to study, assembled in one accessible locality, native California plants; and for the advancement of science and education with reference to plant life indigenous to the State of California.

ITS PURPOSES: (a) An institution founded primarily for scientific research in the field of local botany.

(b) To preserve the native California flora, try to replenish the depleted supply of some of the rarest plants which are rapidly being exterminated, and bring together in a comparatively small area as complete a collection of the rich store of native California plants as can be grown in this southern section of the state, thereby promoting the general welfare of the people of the state by providing the means for encouraging and carrying on the above mentioned activities in said state and by doing such other things as may be necessary and desirable to carry out the objects hereof."

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